

Texas attorney general investigating fraud allegations in Dallas County race

By KEVIN KRAUSE / The Dallas Morning News

kkrause@dallasnews.com

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Allegations of mail-in ballot fraud in a Democratic primary in Dallas County are being investigated by the Texas attorney general's office, state and county officials said Tuesday.

The investigation, which Dallas County commissioners had asked for, is centered mostly on absentee votes in the justice of the peace election between incumbent Luis Sepulveda and winner Carlos Medrano.

Such investigations, while not uncommon in South Texas, are rare in Dallas County, where election officials can recall only one successful prosecution in two dozen years.

Sepulveda, who says he's found examples of bogus voting, welcomed the inquiry.

It "needs to be done. It's a big step in the right direction," he said.

Medrano could not be reached, but he previously has denied being behind any election improprieties in the precinct, which includes South Dallas and much of Oak Cliff.

Anna Casey, his campaign manager, said Tuesday: "We're confident we did everything right in the election. At the end of the day, if there was any fraud, it'll probably be tied to Carlos' opponent."

County Judge Jim Foster, a Democrat who also lost his re-election bid last month, and two Republican commissioners said they wanted GOP Attorney General Greg Abbott to step in because they didn't trust District Attorney Craig Watkins, a Democrat, to properly investigate the matter.

"This is absolutely necessary to bring an end to a longtime tradition of voter fraud in Dallas County," Foster said.

Watkins' office did not respond to a request for comment.

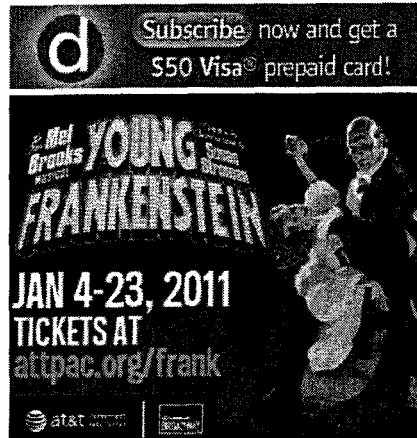
Bruce Sherbet, the county's elections chief, said it's unusual because the district attorney normally handles voter fraud allegations.

An Abbott spokesman said he couldn't comment on an active criminal investigation.

Sherbet has told county commissioners that based on complaints his office received he had no reason to suspect widespread fraud in the primary. He said he forwarded seven complaints to the Texas secretary of state.

In an April 20 letter, the secretary of state office's elections director, Ann McGeehan, asked the attorney general for help, citing evidence of nine possible crimes. They included illegal voting, obstructing a poll watcher, unlawfully assisting a voter and providing false information on a ballot application.

Sepulveda, who lost his re-election bid in Precinct 5 by 154 votes, has sued the county to contest the results, saying they were tainted. He won the most votes on March 2, but Medrano pulled ahead with twice as many mail-in votes.



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